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WILDLIFE SERVICES—LOUISIANA

Contact Information:

Dwight LeBlanc, Louisiana Wildlife Services State Director

P.O. Box 589

Port Allen, LA 70767

Phone: (225) 389-0229 FAX: (225) 389-0228

Toll-Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297

E-mail: Dwight.LeBlanc@aphis.usda.gov

Web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/ws

USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Louisiana

Every day, residents, industry, organizations and public agencies call on Louisiana Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting a variety of resources that are threatened due to damage caused by wildlife. Birds can seriously damage rice and other grain crops and fruits and nuts such as strawberries and pecans. Some birds prey on aquacultural crops, such as crawfish and catfish. Beaver frequently cause significant damage to timber and other natural resources, row crops, dams, roadways, bridges, and public utilities. Louisiana WS personnel strive to resolve these types of damage caused by wildlife. Louisiana WS also supports safety in aviation by working with airport managers and regulatory agencies to develop and implement airport wildlife management plans that ultimately protect pilots, passengers, and aircraft from dangerous strikes between aircraft and wildlife. WS assists State and Federal wildlife agencies to protect threatened and endangered species and natural habitats from other wildlife species. It also conducts monitoring activities related to rabies and other zoonosis. WS's professional wildlife biologists respond to requests for assistance by implementing effective, selective, and humane wildlife damage management strategies.

Louisiana citizens represent a diverse melting pot of ethnic cultures and socio-economic classes. The state has a wide variety of ecological



habitats, including large cities, small towns, and sparsely populated rural areas comprised of agricultural lands, prairies, upland forests, swamps, and marshes. The State population exceeds 4.3 million and is increasing. Consequently, increased contact between humans and wildlife is inevitable. The continued encroachment of people into wildlife habitat will result in more reports of wildlife damage to resources that are economically or aesthetically important to humans.

• • • • • Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting sprouting and headed rice from blackbird damage
- Protecting resources from damage by the Federally-threatened Louisiana black bear
- Protecting timber and other natural resources, highway infrastructures, threatened and endangered species, row crops, and property from beaver damage
- Protecting human health and safety from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting livestock from coyote damage and property from other wildlife damage

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Louisiana:

- Improving available damage management methods for the protection of coastal marshes from damage by nutria
- Developing new repellents and improving existing damage control methods for the protection of sprouting and headed rice from blackbird damage
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Identifying baits that can be used to deliver oral rabies vaccines to skunks and other wildlife
- Collecting data to address issues related to beaver, fish-eating birds, and the Louisiana black bear

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS often enables many people to resolve reported wildlife conflicts on their own by offering advice, written information, equipment and materials. This *technical assistance* is provided in person or by phone or mail. However, when resolving these conflicts is beyond the means of the individual or is too complex, WS conducts *direct assistance* at the damage site. WS also conducts *scientific research* across the nation to find answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to develop state-of-the-art science and technology that can be used by the Program.

Aquaculture Assistance—Louisiana is the largest producer of farm-raised crawfish in the country and has a significant catfish industry. The aquaculture industry is estimated to spend more than \$17 million annually to control bird damage at facilities nationwide. WS conducts research to determine the magnitude of impacts and develop methods to control damage by birds that prey upon catfish and crawfish. The same research will provide additional information for developing strategies that address the management of birds that prey upon sport fish in Louisiana. Louisiana WS routinely provides assistance to crawfish and catfish producers experiencing problems with birds including cormorants, white pelicans, and numerous herons and egret species that

feed on these commodities. WS personnel were instrumental in identifying white pelicans as the source of a parasitic trematode that infects fingerling catfish and weakens their immune system, often causing economically significant losses. Consequently, researchers are now looking for better methods of controlling this disease.

Protecting Agricultural Crops—Blackbirds, particularly red-winged blackbirds and brown-headed cowbirds, can cause severe damage to sprouting rice, especially in the vicinity of large winter roosts. Estimated losses of this resource range between \$5 and \$10 million annually. Since the early 1990's, Louisiana WS has worked diligently to protect sprouting rice fields located near large winter roosts from blackbird damage. Based on direct responses from rice growers in Evangeline Parish, programs conducted in 1989 and 1990 saved growers an average of over \$4,000 per farm or about \$2.8 million annually. Still other surveys estimate the annual direct savings to rice farms from WS activities at more than \$5.8 million. Researchers are currently investigating ways of increasing these savings by improving program methodologies.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Louisiana WS continued to assist airports experiencing problems involving wildlife and associated threats to aircraft and the flying public. Biologists reviewed wildlife hazard management plans required of airports having significant wildlife problems and conducted assessments following major strikes between aircraft and birds.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species Activity—WS protects threatened and endangered (T&E) species from damage by other wildlife species. In Louisiana, WS works to protect the Louisiana pearlshell, a mussel found in the central part of the State, from damage by beaver. Since this work began in the late 1980's, the Louisiana pearlshell has experienced notable recovery, which resulted in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service downlisting the species from endangered to threatened.

WS also protects T&E species by providing immediate responses to problems they cause. For example, WS works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to address complaints involving the Louisiana black bear, a threatened species. This work has been well received by the public and has resulted in the WS program being recognized by both the Secretary of Agriculture and the Black Bear Conservation Committee for its role in protecting the Louisiana black bear from extinction.

Likewise, WS protected almost \$300,000 of bottomland hardwood timber from beaver damage in 2004. This also resulted in intangible benefits related to the maintenance of important habitat used by a myriad of wildlife species.

Major Cooperators

- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry
- Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Federal Aviation Administration
- Black Bear Conservation Committee
- Louisiana Rice Growers Association
- Various Airport Authorities
- Various Parish Police Juries (i.e., county commissions) and Road Commissions

Protecting Property from Beaver Damage—In 1993 alone, losses of commercial timber to beaver in Louisiana exceeded \$13 million. Between 1998 and 2004, more than \$6 million of various beaver-caused resource losses were reported in Louisiana. Consequently, WS conducts numerous beaver management projects on private, State, and Federal properties to protect agriculture, human health and safety, general property and natural resources from damage. Since 1999, WS in Louisiana has protected more than \$12 million in valuable resources, including bottomland hardwood timber, highways and bridges, dams, drainage ditches and canals, and crops.

Looking to the Future

Increased damage to many valuable resources by birds is becoming more difficult to keep under control. For example, various birds damage rice, other grain and fruit crops, aircraft, and other airport property; threaten air passenger safety; serve as potential disease vectors; and prey upon crawfish and other aquatic species. Beaver and bears are other causes of increased wildlife damage in the State. In addition, raccoon rabies is threatening to enter Louisiana from states to the east. Without the appropriate level of attention and professional management of many of these conflicts, it will become more difficult for WS to successfully resolve many wildlife conflicts and ensure equal access for all Louisiana citizens to Program services.

Louisiana Wildlife Services Funding

WS operates a cooperatively funded program that uses both Federally allocated funds and funding and/or other resources provided by cooperators, including producers; Federal, State, and Local government agencies; and private individuals who are experiencing or have an interest in wildlife damage management.

